



Christian Spiritual Education in Hong Kong Kindergartens: The Predictors of Teachers' Self-Efficacy

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Abstract. In Hong Kong, many young children receive education in Christian faith-based kindergartens (Education Bureau School Education Statistics Section, 2024). One of the core missions in these schools is to promote children's spirituality. This study explores the educator and school factors that influence the teachers' self-efficacy in Christian spiritual education (TSE in CSE). Using hierarchical regression analyses, the findings suggest that three predictors, namely 'Christian identity', 'types of Christian training received' and 'school's religious context created by the school management' are significantly and positively associated with TSE in CSE. It is recommended that school management should create a good religious atmosphere in schools and provide ample support and guidelines for teachers to conduct CSE. Schools can also consider inviting Christian educators who have a higher TSE in CSE to take up the leading role of the school's spiritual curriculum, and facilitate teachers' spirituality and competence in CSE through organizing different religious activities. It is vital for CSE teachers in faith-based schools to receive more Christian training to equip themselves with theological knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and teaching skills in CSE from various training providers such as churches, seminaries and Christian organizations.

Keywords: Christian Spiritual Education, Religion Education, Early Childhood Education, Teachers' Self-Efficacy

1 Kindergarten Spiritual Education in Hong Kong

Christianity is recognized as being the most influential religion in Hong Kong's education system. The statistics of student enrolment in kindergartens indicate that there were 136,095 kindergarten children in 2023; 46.9% of them were studying in schools with no religious background, followed by 41.6% in Christian / Protestant schools, 8.3% in Catholic schools and 1.8% in Buddhist schools. There was a total of 53.1% of kindergarteners studying in religious schools¹ (Education Bureau School Education Statistics Section, 2024). Christian / Protestant schools, therefore, play a significant role as the largest religious group to nurture our children in holistic

¹ Figures represent the situation as of 15 September 2023, including nursery, lower and upper classes in kindergarten-cum-child care centres.

development, not only in the developmental objectives of Ethics, Intellect, Physique, Social Skills and Aesthetics (The Curriculum Development Council, 2017), but also in spirituality.

Although a large population of religious preschools tremendously influences early childhood education (ECE) in Hong Kong, little research has been conducted on spirituality and religious education in Hong Kong kindergarten settings. Among the local studies on spirituality, most investigated different religions, or with/without religions, rather than focusing on a single religion like Christianity. Besides, some studies also focused on specific topics like inclusive education and holistic education (Lai & Zhang, 2014; Lau, 2010; Ng et al., 2020; Ng & Fisher, 2022; Ng, 2011; Ng & Luk, 2019; Zhang, 2014). On the other hand, children's spirituality and religious education are not explicitly highlighted in the ECE curriculum documents proposed by the Government. It is found that the words 'spirituality' and 'religion' were not mentioned in the past ECE curriculum guides over the past decades; even though the word 'beliefs' was found across the guides, it seldom appeared (The Curriculum Development Council, 1993, 1996, 2006, 2017).

Understandably, giving recommendations and curriculum guides for spiritual and religious education is extremely hard as each religion has its own beliefs, rituals, doctrines and practices. Lau (2010) also discovered that the government wanted a shift of paradigm from a religious-oriented education to a spiritual education on a non-religious basis. From the government documents, it is found that the wordings of 'positive values' and 'attitudes', which are broader in meaning, are massively highlighted so as to foster positive virtues like self-understanding and confidence, respect for and caring about other people, braving in facing growth changes, optimism, and demonstrating good behaviour and passion for life (Education Bureau, 2022; The Curriculum Development Council, 2017).

2 Different Definitions of Spirituality

In recent years, there has been considerable interest in spirituality; nonetheless, many experts argue about what spirituality actually means. Since researchers lack consensus on the definition of spirituality in academia, many attempts have been made to elaborate on the meaning of spirituality in different epistemologies of disciplines. Besides, not much is known about how practitioners conceptualize children's spirituality (Adams et al., 2016; Giesenberg, 2000; Mata-McMahon et al., 2020).

Many researchers have expressed their views on the definitions of spirituality from different perspectives. Greenfield (2018) claimed that Early Childhood Education (ECE) educators defined spirituality as happiness, joy, and inner peace. It is about who we are and the essence and soul that define us. Spirituality can also be linked to aspects of seeking justice, celebrating diversity, and aspects like something you feel, consciousness, and a connectedness to the environment, others, and God. Giesenberg (2000) pointed out that spirituality is investigated in the areas of education, religion and psychology, with special focus on how it is viewed concerning children. Spirituality means a sense of love and compassion towards the world and everything in it. It is an innate ability to express consciousness or awareness of the

surrounding world. For certain people, it is also a relationship with a transcendent being. Mata-McMahon et al., (2019) realized that in the extant literature, there are multiple definitions of spirituality. Therefore, they concluded that spirituality is the innate life or light within which is nurtured through love, facilitates connections and relationships, and expresses itself in ways of wonder, compassion and joy, among many other manifestations and virtues. The spirit expresses itself in everyday interests and moments. Spirituality can also be nurtured and cultivated by giving opportunities for joy and wonder, loving relationships, a beautiful environment, and by facilitating the emergence of virtues that express the spirit. As a result, drawing a single definition of spirituality is nearly impossible, as the term ‘spirituality’ is widely used in various fields to represent different virtues, connections, feelings and relationships (Giesenberg, 2000; Greenfield, 2018; Mata-McMahon et al., 2019).

In spite of various definitions of spirituality, it is worth mentioning the epistemological stance of spirituality in this paper: A Christian-centred perspective of spirituality, focusing on the human being created by God and the relationship between God and humans. As it is written in the Bible:

Then the LORD God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being. (Genesis 2:7, NIV)

He refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths for his name’s sake. (Psalms 23:3, NIV)

This kind of spirituality is not merely in the religious and spiritual realm, but is parallel to other developmental areas and extended to other domains in human life. Just as the Bible says:

And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man. (Luke 2:52, NIV)

Now this Daniel was distinguishing himself above the other supervisors and the satraps, for he had an extraordinary spirit. In fact, the king intended to appoint him over the entire kingdom. (Daniel 6:3, NET)

Jesus’s growth is an excellent example of a holistic model of spirituality, whereas Daniel’s case demonstrates how an extraordinary spirit is essential in his work.

3 Teachers’ Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy is not unique in the educational field. The term can be used in any activity that needs specific care and skill, for instance, baking a cake and driving a car. Undoubtedly, teaching also comprises a wide range of tasks. To successfully perform teaching duties, teachers always need a sense of capability and confidence. Studies often identify three core skill areas for teachers’ self-efficacy (TSE), which are classroom management, instructional strategies and student engagement (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001; Tschannen-Moran, Hoy, & Hoy, 1998, as cited in Street, 2022). Nevertheless, many attempts have been made to develop or validate TSE scales (Ene et al., 2021; Kocabas et al., 2018; Ma et al., 2023).

In fact, various studies investigated TSE in relation to different aspects of

education, such as student issues. Ruggeri-DiLello (2015) examined TSE with students' factors, finding a relationship between student resistance and student misbehaviours on TSE. Studies also showed a positive correlation between teachers' perceived relationship with students and TSE. High TSE educators are more likely to reduce conflict and build a closer relationship with students because they feel more confident in their ability to promote students' class engagement and adopt useful strategies in classroom management (Hajovsky et al., 2020, as cited in Yin et al., 2022). On the other hand, Lipscomb et al., (2022) discovered that TSE and professional support (workplace resource) could predict greater work engagement, explaining job demands as well as teachers' professional development and education. Similarly, moderated mediation in another study proved that compared to teachers with low self-efficacy, a more significant positive impact was possessed by high self-efficacy teachers on the relationship between student academic achievement and teacher work engagement (Wang, 2022). In addition, Barsh (2015) examined teacher spirituality and TSE. A TSE scale with three constructs was used in the study, i.e., student engagement, classroom management and instructional strategies. Results showed a direct effect of transcendent beliefs regarding life on student engagement, while indirect effects were found on classroom management and instructional strategies. All the above examples suggest the diverse applications of TSE in educational studies.

3.1 Why is Teachers' Self-Efficacy Important?

Teachers play an essential role in children's development and learning. Yet, they experience stressors that may negatively affect their relationships with children and well-being, and even lead to job retention eventually (Lipscomb et al., 2022). Research revealed that low self-efficacy may lower one's professional expectations or even result in giving up when an individual experiences challenges; conversely, believing in one's abilities is a significant contributing factor to resilience when facing adversity (Tschannen-Moran and Hoy, 2001, as cited in Yoder et al., 2024). Therefore, investigating teachers' self-efficacy has become a well-known topic in academia. When it comes to the context of Christian schools, Street (2022) clearly asserts that teaching in Christian schools is also not an easy job. According to Christian Education National (2021), Christian schools and teachers are expected to offer a biblically authentic and transforming approach to education, which can position the gospel as the primary shaper of our thinking and living and celebrate the lordship of Jesus Christ over all of life (as cited in Street, 2022). These expectations require teachers to possess good skills in their subjects and a high self-efficacy in delivering Christian values and knowledge to students, helping them transform their lives Christianly by leading them to connect with our Lord Jesus.

3.2 Teachers' Self-Efficacy in Spiritual Education

Since teachers' self-efficacy relates to various educational areas, many studies have been conducted not only in secular educational settings but also in religious settings.

Within this category, I discovered two types of TSE research; the first is using the religious settings as the ‘context’ to study TSE. Holloman’s (2021) correlational study among Christian school teachers is an example. The study aimed to determine if a correlation exists between TSE and authentic followership. The Tschannen-Moran and Hoy’s TSE short form scale was adopted (Hoy, n.d.; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001, as cited in Holloman, 2021). The study addressed three subcategories of teachers’ sense of self-efficacy, i.e., instructional strategies, student engagement and classroom management, but did not particularly focus on TSE in religious education.

On the contrary, the second type of TSE research aims to examine TSE in religious education; those TSE scales are related to measuring some ‘religious’ items. For instance, Kocabas and co-workers (2018) wanted to develop a scale to measure TSE in teaching theology courses for K-12 grades. The scale comprises five sections related to religion, i.e., general religious groups, belief in person, narrow religious groups, modern movement of religion and world religion. The newly constructed TSE scale towards religious groups was proven to be a reliable and valid instrument. Moreover, some studies, like Williams (2021), investigated the impact of biblical worldview training programs on TSE. In his survey, some questions were developed to ask the participants about their TSE in biblical integration and biblical modelling based on their personal experience, for instance, ‘I am confident in my ability to find specific passages in Scripture that relate to my content’ and ‘I am comfortable leading public prayer with students outside of class time’. A similar study, conducted by Yoder et al. (2024), was performed to examine teacher faith integration self-efficacy in North America. In their study, 13 statements were used to assess TSE with a five-point Likert scale. One example of the questions is ‘To what extent can you show students they are loved and valued by God, which enables them to value and love each other?’. In a nutshell, TSE studies with a religious and spiritual aspect are diversified; experts develop and utilize different kinds of TSE scales to address their research needs and contexts.

3.3 Teachers’ Spirituality

Teachers’ spirituality is recognized as one of the crucial factors in Christian spiritual education. Unlike teaching other academic subjects, conducting Christian spiritual education requires teachers to possess biblical and theological knowledge and a religious life originating from a spiritual being. Imagine that when a CSE teacher teaches children how to pray, they are not only transmitting the skills of prayer or the knowledge in prayer passages, but also leading the children to be submitted before the throne of God, to come closer to Him, to seek Him and to worship Him. Thus, a spiritual and religious teacher is more likely to understand and acknowledge the value of Christian spiritual education. Some studies also support the importance of teachers’ spirituality and religiosity on TSE. For instance, Wright (2010) discovered a strong positive relationship between TSE and extrinsic religiosity; Greene (2020), replicating Grant’s (2019) research, found a statistically significant relationship between TSE and spirituality (as cited in Street, 2020).

Nevertheless, some existing studies also observed no significant findings

regarding teachers' spirituality and religiosity. For example, Yoder et al. (2024) reported that they could not find a significant relationship between faith integration self-efficacy and participating in a Christian or Mennonite initial teacher education program. Williams's (2021) study also failed to show that the impact of training programs on TSE had statistically significant differences. One of the reasons may be different measuring tools. As mentioned, the definition of spirituality is inconsistent in academia; spirituality could widely refer to whole-person development or have a strong religious focus. (Similarly, TSE, another common variable in teachers' spirituality studies, could also have diverse research emphases.) This creates the probability of different research findings. Using the studies of Kuang et al., (2023) and Barsh (2015) on teachers' spirituality as an example, Kuang et al., (2023) aimed to explore the relationships between subjective quality of life and teachers' spiritual well-being. They adopted Fisher's (2010) scale of Spiritual Health and Life Orientation Measure (SHALOM) in their study to assess four spiritual domains (i.e., environmental, communal, personal and transcendental); the sample items include "connection with nature" (environmental), "trust between individuals" (communal), "joy in life" (personal) and "worship of the Creator" (transcendental). The scale demonstrates multifaceted domains of spiritual health (as cited in Kuang et al., 2023). Conversely, Barsh (2015), who investigates the relationship between TSE and teacher spirituality, adopts a more religious scale, i.e., the Daily Spiritual Experience Scale (DSES), which measures the constructs of 'transcendent beliefs regarding life' and 'connection to God'. Consequently, owing to different measurements of teachers' spirituality and different variables in the studies, teacher spirituality is sometimes proven to be significant or insignificant. In spite of this, to address teachers' spirituality, scholars propose launching professional development training for teachers to reflect on their own spiritual experiences (Kuang et al., 2023). School administrators are also encouraged to wholeheartedly and fully implement Christian education in their schools, assisting teachers in accumulating enactive mastery experiences of teaching Christianly (Street, 2022).

4 Research Design and Procedures

This study investigated what educator and school factors predict teachers' self-efficacy in Christian spiritual education. I proposed six hypotheses in the study:

Hypothesis 1 (H1). *'Christian identity' would predict TSE in CSE.*

Hypothesis 2 (H2). *'Types of Christian training received' would predict TSE in CSE.*

Hypothesis 3 (H3). *'Year of believing in the Lord' would predict TSE in CSE.*

Hypothesis 4 (H4). *'Faith maturity' would predict TSE in CSE.*

Hypothesis 5 (H5). *'Religious practices' would predict TSE in CSE.*

Hypothesis 6 (H6). *'The school's religious context created by the school*

management' would predict TSE in CSE.

This study was a part of my doctoral thesis, '*Christian Spiritual Education in Hong Kong Kindergartens: A Mixed Methods Study of the Predictors of Teachers' Self-Efficacy and Programme Delivery*'. My study used an online questionnaire survey as the data collection tool. Some questions were based on and modified from scholarly research (Benson et al., 1993; Hui et al., 2011; Kocabas et al., 2018; Myers, 2009; Stripp, 2009). The survey questions were mainly divided into demographic questions, measuring scales, and open-ended questions. I adopted five different scales in my study, i.e., 'Christian Spiritual Education Programme Delivery Scale' (CSEPDS), 'Teachers' Self-Efficacy Scale in Christian Spiritual Education' (TSES in CSE), 'Faith Maturity Scale' (FMS), 'Religious Practices Scale' (RPS), and 'School's Religious Context Scale' (SRCS). As this paper focused on TSE in CSE, only the results of the latter four scales will be presented and discussed. The questionnaire was designed in a bilingual format of Chinese and English. The participants could read both the traditional Chinese version and the English version at the same time. This bilingual design decreased the language barrier for participants in completing the survey because Chinese and English are common languages used in Hong Kong. The bilingual design also increased the clarity of the meaning of questions.

The questionnaire survey was launched from August to October 2024. Ethical approval of this study was given by my university's Human Research Ethics Committee before the data collection. Written consent forms were received from all the participants to ensure their willingness to participate in the study.

4.1 Participants

The survey participants were made up of 200 ECE educators who were working in Hong Kong kindergartens with Christian backgrounds (including Christian nurseries, childcare centres, kindergartens or nursery schools that provided early childhood education for 2-6 or 3-6-year-old children). They included principal, vice-principal, head teacher, deputy head teacher, class teacher, teaching assistant, specialist teacher, and other teaching positions. I recruited them by sending invitation emails to the local Christian kindergartens and in-service ECE educators studying at my university, as well as via my personal networks and snowball effects.

4.2 Teachers' Self-Efficacy Scale in Christian Spiritual Education (TSES in CSE)

The Teachers' Self-Efficacy Scale in Christian Spiritual Education (TSES in CSE) is a self-developed scale for measuring the outcome variable of this study. Unlike the commonly used Teacher Self-Efficacy Scale (TSES), which measures the three constructs of classroom management, instructional strategies and student engagement (Barsh, 2015), the TSES in CSE of the current study, which adopts Myers's (2009) programme dimensions as the basic framework, focuses on measuring the participants' perceived self-efficacy of conducting Christian spiritual education. The TSES in CSE is comprised of 17 items of eight Christian spiritual education

constructs, namely 'Faith development for children' (3 items), 'Prayer' (2 items), 'Biblical truth' (2 items), 'Service' (2 items), 'Worship' (2 items), 'Character Building' (2 items), 'Assessment' (2 items) and 'Parental Involvement' (2 items). The item statements start with self-evaluated wordings like 'I know...', 'I can...', 'I have...', and 'I am ...'. Participants rated their answers on a 6-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 6 (Strongly Agree). The mean score of all items would be the total TSE score for the participant, which was used as the outcome variable in this study. The 6-point scale does not allow a 'neutral' option; participants could only choose a positive or negative option. The sample items of TSES in CSE contain 'I can help children know that everyone is guilty and understand the importance of believing in the Lord Jesus', 'I can guide children to express their needs to God through prayer', 'I am knowledgeable enough to talk about biblical truths with children (e.g., telling Bible stories and discussing faith)', 'I know how to nurture children to develop faith-based character, e.g., the fruit of the Spirit' and 'I have the ability to set assessment goals and make assessments for children's spiritual development'.

4.3 Faith Maturity Scale (FMS)

The Faith Maturity Scale (FMS) was used to measure the participants' faith maturity, which is a predictor in this study concerning the degree to which people embody perspectives characteristic of life-transforming and vibrant faith as well as commitments and priorities. The FMS was developed from 1987 to 1988, during an 18-month period. The first version of FMS consisted of 38 survey items of faith maturity. It was employed in a study of Protestant denominations. Afterwards, a 12-item scale was developed, and it showed a reliability comparable to the original FMS (Benson et al., 1993). Later, FMS was further validated by Hui et al. (2011) within Chinese Christian community. The study was a large sample research study ($n=2,196$) that used a short form of a 12-item FMS to examine its validity, reliability, and internal structure in Chinese Christians. The short form FMS was translated into Chinese (Chou & Chen, 2005; Fu, 2008, as cited in Hui et al., 2011). The study revealed that even though FMS was developed for a mainline Protestant population in North America, it also has validity among non-mainline Protestants and non-Westerners. Furthermore, two items from FMS were dropped due to their unstable psychometric properties in previous research (Hui et al., 2011).

Consequently, I adopted the 10-item short form of FMS proposed by Hui et al. (2011) in my study. The FMS comprises vertical and horizontal dimensions. The vertical dimension focuses on maintaining the relationship with God while the horizontal dimension emphasizes service to humanity, in justice and mercy (Benson et al., 1993, as cited in Hui et al., 2011). There are four horizontal dimension items and six vertical dimension items. The sample items of the horizontal dimension are 'I feel a sense of responsibility for reducing pain and suffering in the world', 'I give significant portions of time and money to help other people' and 'I care a great deal about reducing poverty in my country and throughout the world'. The sample items of the vertical dimension are 'I feel God's presence in my relationships with other

people', 'I talk with other people about my faith' and 'I have a real sense that God is guiding me'. Participants needed to rate the items on a 7-point Likert scale (Hui et al., 2011). The scale ranges from 1 (never true) to 7 (always true) (Benson et al., 1993, as cited in Stripp, 2009). The horizontal and vertical dimensions would be analyzed separately.

Before the participants answered the FMS, I set a question to ask the religious belief of the participants, such as Christianity (Protestantism), Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, Buddhism, Islam and no religious affiliation. If the participants indicated their religions as Christianity (Protestantism), Catholicism, or Eastern Orthodoxy, I further set a question of 'how long have you believed in the Lord' to collect their years of believing in the Lord. In this study, they would all be regarded as 'Christians' and were directed to complete the FMS in the online questionnaire. 'Years of believing in the Lord' would also be used as one of the Christian-related predictors for predicting TSE in CSE.

4.4 Religious Practices Scale (RPS)

The Religious Practices Scale (RPS) was used to measure whether the participants had engaged in different religious activities in the past month. It was another predictor in this study. The scale's idea came from the study of Hui et al. (2011). I set 8 questions to collect participants' religious practices on different dimensions; some of the religious activities were that the participants would do alone, whereas others were that they might do with or to other people. Participants reported their religious practices by answering 'yes' or 'no' for each item. The sample items of RPS include 'praying to God alone', 'listening / Singing hymns alone', 'participating in church worship (service) or mass', 'participating in church services (e.g., church worship team and child tutor, etc.)' and 'sharing the gospel with others'. Since the RPS applies to Christian participants, only Christian participants would complete the RPS.

4.5 School's Religious Context Scale (SRCS)

'School's religious context created by the school management' was another predictor in this study. To ensure a high-quality Christian education program in a school, school administrators are crucial, as their decisions and attitudes will affect the school's operation. School administrators should wholeheartedly and fully implement Christian spiritual education in their schools so as to help their teachers teach Christianly (Street, 2022). I developed the School's Religious Context Scale (SRCS) to measure the school's religious context created by the school management. It is a scale with four items, and its idea was inspired by Myers (2009). The four items consist of 'Our management attaches great importance to the spiritual development of children', 'Our management provides teachers with spiritual education training, teaching materials and guidelines', 'Our management focuses on religious education for parents (e.g., organizing faith parenting seminars)', and 'Our management demonstrates Christian character at work'. These questions examined the attitude that the school management held towards Christian spiritual education, the actions that the school management

took for Christian spiritual education, and the Christian character that the school management possessed. Participants rated the items with a 6-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 6 (Strongly Agree). There is no 'neutral' option, so that only positive or negative feelings could be chosen.

5 Results

Two hierarchical regression analyses were employed to examine what school and educator factors predicted teachers' self-efficacy in Christian spiritual education. The first analysis contained all the participants (Christian and non-Christian educators) while the second only included Christian educators. The predictors are listed below:

Teacher predictors²:

- Demographic variables: 'Gender', 'Age', 'Position', 'Teaching experience' and 'Highest qualification'
- Christian variables: 'Christian identity' (Christian or non-Christian) and 'Type of Christian training received'

School predictor³:

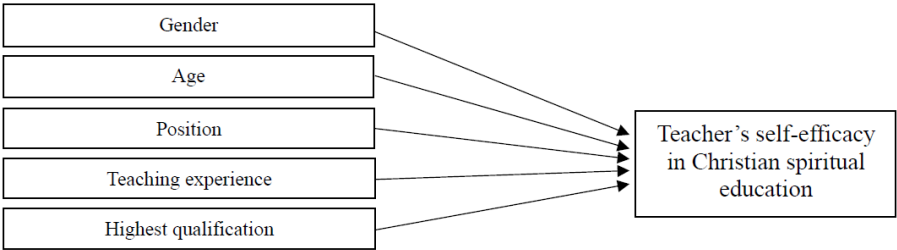
- Christian variable: 'School's religious context created by school management'

In the first hierarchical regression analysis, I set two blocks (Models) of variables. The first block (Model 1) contained the demographic variables as the predictors, including 'Gender', 'Age', 'Position', 'Teaching experience' and 'Highest qualification', with 'Teachers' self-efficacy of Christian spiritual education' as the dependent variable. In block two (Model 2), the Christian variables were included as the predictors, i.e., 'Christian identity' (Christian or non-Christian), 'Type of Christian training received', 'School's religious context created by school management' (See Figure 1).

² The term 'teacher' in 'Teacher predictors' did not only refer to 'frontline teacher', but also the school administrators, such as principal and head teacher. I used 'teacher predictors' to represent educators' individual predictors, i.e., those predictors were personal factors.

³ School predictor referred to the predictor of the school management. In my questionnaire survey, I used the term 'Our management' to start the questions. It was easy for participants to link this expression with the leadership of the school principal, and/or with their senior management team, including the deputy principal and the head teacher.

Model 1



Model 2

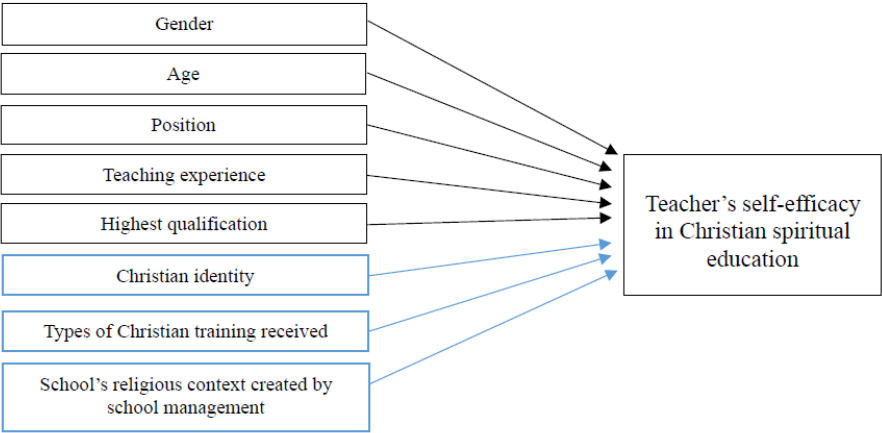


Figure 1: The hierarchical regression models predicting teachers' self-efficacy in Christian spiritual education (Christian and non-Christian educators)

The results were presented in Table 1. Model 1 with only demographic predictors was significant ($R^2=.064$, $F_{\text{change}}(5, 194)=2.655$, $p=.024$); however, Model 2 was found to be the best model ($R^2=.478$, $F_{\text{change}}(8, 191)=21.845$, $p<.001$), which showed significant improvement from Model 1. The three Christian predictors in Model 2 (i.e., Christian identity, Christian training and School's religious context) together accounted for an additional 41.4% of the variance of Teachers' self-efficacy of Christian spiritual education, even after the effects of the demographic predictors of Gender, Age, Position, Teaching experience and Highest qualification were statistically controlled for ($\Delta R^2=.414$, $F_{\text{change}}(3, 191)=50.443$, $p<.001$). All the Christian predictors in Model 2 were also significantly and positively associated with Teachers' self-efficacy of Christian spiritual education, with the results of Christian identity ($\beta=.196$, $t=2.968$, $p=.003$), Christian training ($\beta=.289$, $t=4.520$, $p<.001$) and School's religious context ($\beta=.514$, $t=9.472$, $p<.001$) (Fein et al., 2022; SPSS analysis, 2025).

Table 1: Hierarchical regression analysis for predicting teachers' self-efficacy in Christian spiritual education (Christian and Non-Christian educators)

Variables	Coefficients					Model Summary					
	B	SE	β	t	Sig.	R ²	ΔR^2	ΔF	df1	df2	Sig. ΔF
Model 1^a:						.064	.064	2.655	5	194	.024
Demographic predictors											
Gender	.001	.303	.000	.002	.998						
Age	-.065	.102	-.092	-.639	.524						
Position	.172	.110	.150	1.562	.120						
Teaching experience	.016	.011	.220	1.432	.154						
Highest qualification	-.030	.093	-.026	-.324	.746						
Model 2^b:						.478	.414	50.443	3	191	<.001
with Christian predictors											
Gender	-.280	.230	-.065	-1.218	.225						
Age	-.104	.078	-.147	-1.341	.182						
Position	.102	.084	.089	1.219	.224						
Teaching experience	.002	.008	.022	.185	.853						
Highest qualification	-.084	.070	-.072	-1.192	.235						
Christian identity	.289	.097	.196	2.968	.003						
Christian training	.151	.033	.289	4.520	<.001						
School's religious context created by school management	.359	.038	.514	9.472	<.001						

Note. N=200 (the entire sample size)
^a Test of goodness-of-fit of Model 1: R²=.064, F_{change} (5, 194)=2.655, p=.024 (ANOVA)
^b Test of goodness-of-fit of Model 2: R²=.478, F_{change} (8, 191)=21.845, p<.001 (ANOVA)

In order to test the predictions of Christian predictors specific to Christians, another hierarchical regression analysis was conducted with two blocks of variables. The first block (Model 1) included demographic predictors of ‘Gender’, ‘Age’, ‘Position’, ‘Teaching experience’ and ‘Highest qualification’ as the predictors, with ‘Teachers’ self-efficacy in Christian spiritual education’ as the dependent variable. In block two (Model 2), six Christian predictors were also added as the predictor variables. There were four Christian predictors that were particular to Christian educators, namely ‘Year of believing in the Lord’, ‘Faith maturity (Horizontal)’, ‘Faith maturity (Vertical)’ and ‘Religious practices’. The other Christian predictors were ‘Types of Christian training received’ and ‘School’s religious context created by school management’. The predictor of ‘Christian identity’ (Christian or non-Christian) was not included as all the participants (n=109) were Christian educators this time, i.e., believers in Christianity (Protestantism), Eastern Orthodoxy and Catholicism (See Figure 2).

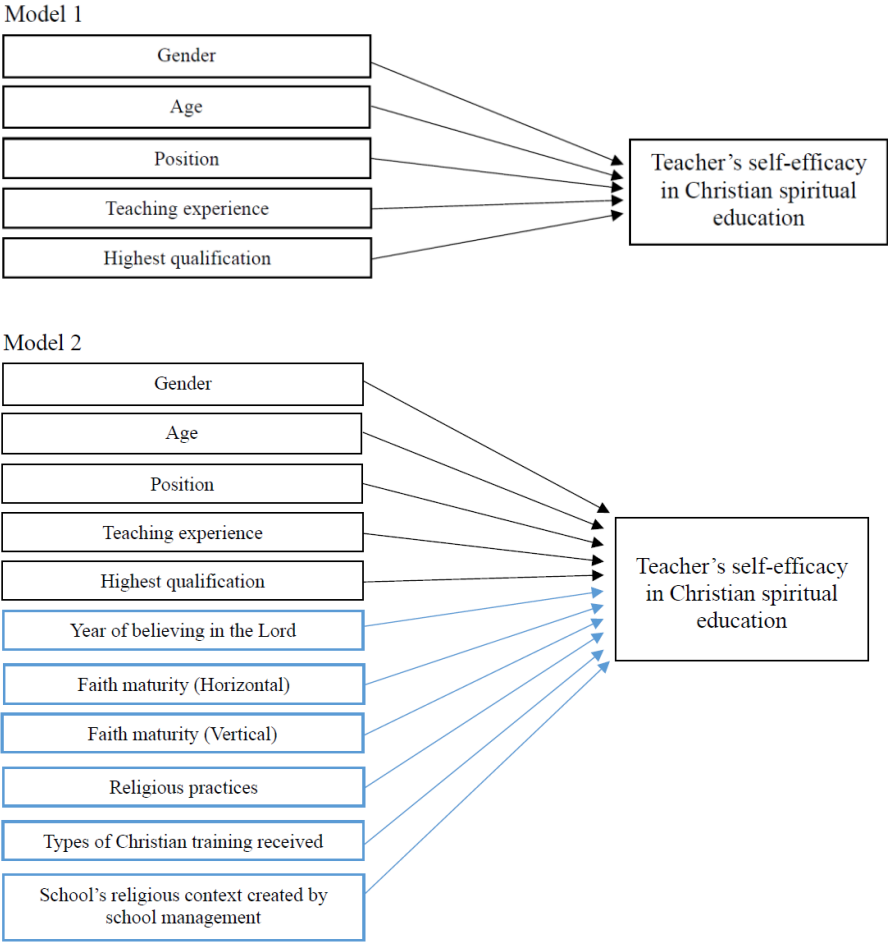


Figure 2: The hierarchical regression models predicting teachers' self-efficacy in Christian spiritual education (Christian educators only)

Table 2 presents the hierarchical regression result. Regarding the goodness-of-fit of the models, Model 1 with only demographic predictors was insignificant ($R^2=.083$, $F_{\text{change}}(5, 103)=1.866$, $p=.107$), representing that this model could not significantly predict Teachers' self-efficacy in Christian spiritual education. However, Model 2, which added the Christian predictors of Year of believing in the Lord, Faith maturity (Horizontal), Faith maturity (Vertical), Religious practices, Christian training and School's religious context, could predict Teachers' self-efficacy in Christian spiritual education significantly ($R^2=.502$, $F_{\text{change}}(11, 97)=8.876$, $p<.001$). It is surprising to note that the newly added predictors that were solely for Christian educators (i.e., Year of believing in the Lord, Faith maturity (Horizontal), Faith maturity (Vertical), Religious practices) were all insignificant in contributing to the

prediction of Teachers' self-efficacy in Christian spiritual education. Instead, only Christian training ($\beta=.220$, $t=2.684$, $p=.009$) and School's religious context ($\beta=.465$, $t=5.885$, $p<.001$) were found to be significant predictors with positive associations with Teachers' self-efficacy in Christian spiritual education. Overall, Model 2 was selected as the best model. The six Christian predictors, i.e., Year of believing in the Lord, Faith maturity (Horizontal), Faith maturity (Vertical), Religious practices, Christian training and School's religious context, together accounted for an additional 41.9% of the variance of Teachers' self-efficacy in Christian spiritual education after statistically controlling for the effects of the demographic predictors of Gender, Age, Position, Teaching experience and Highest qualification ($\Delta R^2=.419$, $F_{\text{change}}(6, 97)=13.579$, $p<.001$) (Fein et al., 2022; SPSS analysis, 2025)

Table 2. Hierarchical regression analysis for predicting teachers' self-efficacy in Christian spiritual education (Christian educators only)

Variables	Coefficients					Model Summary					
	B	SE	β	t	Sig.	R ²	ΔR^2	ΔF	df1	df2	Sig. ΔF
Model 1^a:						.083	.083	1.866	5	103	.107
Demographic predictors											
Gender	.251	.336	.072	.749	.456						
Age	-.016	.116	-.030	-.140	.889						
Position	.167	.101	.227	1.652	.102						
Teaching experience	.005	.011	.096	.429	.669						
Highest qualification	.001	.092	.002	.016	.987						
Model 2^b:						.502	.419	13.579	6	97	<.001
with Christian predictors											
Gender	-.073	.260	-.021	-.280	.780						
Age	-.026	.090	-.047	-.287	.775						
Position	.015	.081	.020	.183	.855						
Teaching experience	-.002	.009	-.044	-.239	.812						
Highest qualification	.050	.072	.061	.689	.492						
Year of believing in the Lord	.002	.006	.035	.291	.772						
Faith maturity (Horizontal)	.066	.048	.114	1.366	.175						
Faith maturity (Vertical)	.097	.053	.189	1.827	.071						
Religious practices	.017	.028	.058	.601	.549						
Christian training	.088	.033	.220	2.684	.009						
School's religious context created by school management	.253	.043	.465	5.885	<.001						

Note. N=109. The respondents were believers in either Christianity (Protestantism)(n=107), Eastern

Orthodoxy (n=1) and Catholicism(n=1).

^a Test of goodness-of-fit of Model 1: $R^2=.083$, $F_{\text{change}}(5, 103)=1.866$, $p=.107$ (ANOVA)

^b Test of goodness-of-fit of Model 2: $R^2=.502$, $F_{\text{change}}(11, 97)=8.876$, $p<.001$ (ANOVA)

6 Discussion

The most striking observation from the two regression analyses for predicting Teachers' self-efficacy in Christian spiritual education was that 'Christian training' (teacher predictor) and 'School's religious context created by school management' (school predictor) were significant predictors. These results supported H2 and H6, i.e., 'types of Christian training received' and 'the school's religious context created by the school management' would predict TSE in CSE. Undoubtedly, Christian training is closely related to TSE in CSE. Educators feel competent in their teaching because they know how to grasp the subject knowledge and learn how to teach, i.e., possess knowledge and skills in the relevant domains. Christian training, indeed, provides a way for educators to equip themselves with Christian expertise and skills, so they are more likely to deliver Christian spiritual education content confidently. This study confirmed that whether for believers or non-believers, the more types of Christian training received by educators had a positive impact on their confidence in CSE teaching ($\beta=.289$, $t=4.520$, $p<.001$ in the regression including Christian and non-Christian educators, and $\beta=.220$, $t=2.684$, $p=.009$ in the regression involving Christian educators only). As a result, to enhance the teaching quality and teachers' competency in CSE, CSE teachers in faith-based schools are suggested to receive more Christian training to increase theological knowledge as well as pedagogical knowledge and skills in Christian spiritual education from various training providers like churches, seminaries and Christian organizations. Faith-based schools should also provide Christian education training for their teachers to equip them with CSE knowledge and skills, as well as organizing religious activities such as school fellowship and bible study group to promote teachers' spirituality.

Besides, the significant result of 'School religious context created by school management' in predicting TSE in CSE illustrated the importance of the school management in Christian spiritual education. Surely, school management exerts their impact on Christian spiritual education 'physically', i.e., affecting the operation of school and curriculum arrangement of Christian spiritual education, but the finding suggested that they also influencing Christian spiritual education by affecting CSE educators 'mentally', i.e., affecting TSE in CSE ($\beta=.514$, $t=9.472$, $p<.001$ in the regression including Christian and non-Christian educators, and $\beta=.465$, $t=5.885$, $p<.001$ in the regression involving Christian educators only). Unquestionably, a school with a supportive religious context facilitates their staff to build a stronger TSE in CSE. Just like a child who has grown up in a family with love and care can more easily be a considerate and caring person. This study proved that an educator working in a rich religious context would show higher confidence in conducting Christian spiritual education. Consequently, school management is suggested to create a good religious atmosphere, in which children's spiritual development is fostered by different school practices like providing teachers' CSE training, ample guidelines and

materials. School management should also focus on parents' religious education and demonstrate Christian character at work, so that the whole school is transformed by Christian values, and educators' TSE in CSE can be reinforced. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that the regressions for predicting teachers' self-efficacy in Christian spiritual education in this study included frontline teachers and school administrators, such as principals and head teachers. For this reason, it is possible that if the school administrators had a strong CSE commitment to create a good religious context in schools, they may also have a high TSE in conducting Christian spiritual education activities. As the current result contained TSE in CSE of schools administrators as well as frontline teachers, a future study could be undertaken to further examine the impact of school administrators such as principals and head teachers on frontline teachers such as class teachers and religious teachers, in TSE of CSE.

Moreover, it is fundamental to note that Christian identity (teacher predictor) was found to significantly predict TSE in CSE ($\beta=.196$, $t=2.968$, $p=.003$ in the regression involving Christian and non-Christian educators), supporting H1. This result proved that Christian educators had a higher TSE in CSE. In fact, the result was reasonable and logical. People believe in Jesus Christ for different reasons; nonetheless, they should be told about the basic theological knowledge about Christianity before acknowledging Jesus Christ as Saviour. Some examples are listed here: God created the world, humans sin against God, Jesus died on the cross to forgive our sins, and we will live with God in heaven forever, etc. In addition, as Christians, we will learn to do some religious practices, such as praying to God. For this reason, compared to non-believers, Christian educators are likely to possess more Christian knowledge. This might be one of the possible explanations for Christian identity being a significant predictor of TSE in CSE. It is suggested that faith-based schools can consider inviting Christian educators, who are more confident in conducting CSE, to take up the leading role of the school's spiritual curriculum. However, it is surprising that the teacher and Christian predictors of 'Year of believing in the Lord', 'Faith maturity (Horizontal)', 'Faith maturity (Vertical)', and 'Religious practices' failed to show significant results; the findings in this study did not support H3, H4 and H5. In other words, we could not draw a conclusion that the longer an educator has been a Christian, the higher their TSE in CSE was. Even though an educator had a higher faith maturity in God and toward people, and conducted more religious activities in daily life, we could not assert that they had more confidence in conducting Christian spiritual education activities. It is believed that some other unknown Christian predictors that were not investigated in this study have an impact on TSE in CSE. Further study could be conducted to explore the possible Christian predictors.

7 Conclusion

The study highlighted three significant teacher and school predictors for TSE in CSE, i.e., 'Christian identity', 'types of Christian training received' and 'school's religious context created by the school management'. I hope the findings in this study can

provide some insights for schools and educators to promote TSE in CSE, and children can benefit from receiving quality Christian spiritual education in faith-based schools.

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